



Representative **Kirk Pearson • 39th District**



2004 Session-End Report

The Hits and the Misses

May 2004

Dear Neighbors,

The 2004 legislative session adjourned March 11 following an intense 60 days of considering and adopting legislation. This year's session was a mix of successes and unfinished business.

We approved a supplemental operating budget that provides for additional enrollment in our colleges and universities. We adopted a transportation budget that begins the process for a Granite Falls bypass. We cracked down on child rapists and coaches who prey on students. We passed legislation to help revitalize our beef industry following the mad cow scare. And we provided a wage increase for home health care workers and K-12 non-teaching staff.

Those are a few of the hits. However, we unfortunately had a number of misses too. The Legislature failed to come to agreement on medical malpractice and tort liability reform. It failed to pass tougher laws against makers of methamphetamine and car thieves. It stopped short of allowing prescription drugs to be purchased at a large discount in Canada. And it allowed a bill I sponsored to expand economic fisheries opportunities in our region to die.

These misses are what I consider "unfinished business."

As always, I am interested in your thoughts and comments. Please feel free to contact me at any time. Thank you for the honor of allowing me to serve you.

Sincerely,

Kirk Pearson
State Representative

Supplemental budget addresses immediate needs

Less than a year ago, we adopted a \$23 billion budget to pay for the operations of state government through June 2005. This year, we adopted a supplemental operating budget to address those needs that were unforeseen in the original budget.

The supplemental budget increased spending by less than \$165 million without raising taxes.

For higher education, it provides an additional \$23.9 million, including \$17.2 million for 2,959 college enrollment slots, \$2.3 million for Promise Scholarships, and \$4.5 million for student financial aid.

Nearly \$6 million was added to supplement our state's K-12 education budget. Our plan also provides \$9.5 million toward health benefits for school employees and \$5.5 million for a 1 percent wage increase for classified school staff.

In health care, the supplemental budget includes \$25 million for home caregivers (including a 50-cent per-hour wage increase), \$20.7 million for low-income children's medical premiums, \$10 million for hospital charity care, and \$6.6 million for emergency room budgets.

DISTRICT OFFICE:

720 Murdock St., Suite 101
Sedro-Woolley, WA 98284
(360) 856-3588

MAILING ADDRESS:

P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7816
(During legislative sessions only)

Toll-free legislative hotline:
1-800-562-6000

Representative
KIRK PEARSON • 39th District

THE HITS ✓ *(Bills approved by the Legislature)*

Agriculture

- **Protecting our food supply** - In response to the mad cow disease scare, I co-sponsored two bills to protect our food supply and help our beef industry. House Bill 2802 outlaws trade in live “downer” cows – those too weak or diseased to walk – to ensure they do not enter the beef supply. House Bill 2929 gives meatpackers a temporary tax break until foreign countries lift their embargoes against American beef.



had mostly addressed in-person threats or telephone calls. The new crime of cyberstalking is punishable by as much as one year in jail and a \$5,000 fine.

Transportation

- **Granite Falls bypass** - The supplemental transportation budget includes \$1.8 million for the purchase of land necessary to obtain right of way to construct a bypass around the city of Granite Falls. The majority of gravel used in state highway projects is coming from Granite Falls. With gravel trucks coming through the downtown area, traffic is continually backing up, and that is creating a safety hazard. A highway bypass will help relieve these problems.
- **Highway 9 designation** - Legislation we passed which was signed by the governor designates State Route 9 as a “highway of statewide significance.” Highway 9 begins near Woodinville, continues through most of the 39th District, and ends at the Canadian border. The designation moves the highway up on the priority list for improvements to relieve major traffic congestion along this route and increase safety for motorists.

Health care

- **Small business health insurance** - We approved legislation to help small businesses with 50 or fewer employees to offer their workers less expensive, no-frills health-benefit options. Businesses have struggled with premium increases of

nearly 30 percent a year. This will allow them to continue offering health insurance to their employees at a better price.



Public Safety

- **Child-rape laws:** As a member of the House Criminal Justice and Corrections Committee, I had the opportunity to advance House Bill 2400, which makes it harder for child rapists and molesters to get treatment in lieu of prison time. This measure was signed into law.
- **Coaches who prey:** Legislation aimed at preventing sexual misconduct in schools passed the Legislature. SB 5533 requires school districts to share information about child abuses by former and current employees.
- **Cyberstalking:** Using the Internet to stalk or harass someone is now illegal under a bill I co-sponsored that was signed into law. House Bill 2771 plugs a loophole in state laws against stalking or harassment, which



Tax relief

- **Tax incentives for jobs:** We renewed two tax incentives for high-tech research and development companies which provide high-wage jobs. We also approved a temporary business tax exemption aimed at saving jobs at aluminum smelters, and a sales tax exemption for computer equipment used in printing and publishing.
- **Senior citizen tax relief** - This year, I supported and we passed legislation that increases the maximum income eligibility for seniors and retired disabled people to receive exemptions from a portion of their property tax bills. The measure adds at least \$5,000 to each of the three income thresholds for which some level of property tax relief is available. The top income threshold will be \$35,000. It also allows seniors to deduct Medicare insurance premiums from disposable income counted under the threshold.



2004 Session Highlights

THE MISSES ☹

(Bills that died in the Legislature)

Economy

- **Economic fisheries** - Within the 39th District, we have many rivers and lakes that offer wonderful fishing opportunities. When we get a good run of fish, people come from throughout the state and even from outside of our state to enjoy that opportunity. They come to our restaurants, buy fishing licenses and gear. It really helps our economy.

This year, I prime-sponsored legislation that would have increased those opportunities for fishing and our local economy. The measure would have created a special economic fishery advisory committee that would review and provide guidance on fishing seasons and their impact to local economies. The bill would have allowed alternative fishing seasons to be developed to maximize economic benefits to local communities. It passed the House unanimously, but unfortunately didn't clear the Senate.

Health Care

- **Medical malpractice and tort liability reform** - Most disappointing was the failure of the Legislature to reach agreement on medical malpractice and tort liability reform. A comprehensive reform package placing limits on lawsuits and caps on non-economic damages passed the Senate, but died in the House. I am most concerned that as malpractice insurance premiums continue to climb, we will lose more doctors and access to health services as this crisis continues to worsen. This is a major piece of unfinished business which must be addressed during the 2005 legislative session.
- **Buying prescription drugs from Canada** - Hoping to shave millions from the state budget and help struggling seniors, the House passed a bill authorizing state agencies to buy prescription drugs at a discount from Canadian pharmacies. The measure, which also needed approval from the federal government, died in the Senate.



During the 2004 session, Rep. Kirk Pearson had the opportunity to meet with public school employees from various schools throughout the 39th District.

Public Safety

- **Tougher eco-terrorism laws** - The Legislature failed to take action on a bill I prime sponsored that further tightens the laws against eco-terrorists. This legislation would have allowed the perpetrators of these crimes to be sued, with the victims collecting three times the damages of their loss. It's important legislation for our district following the incident last year in which eco-terrorists released 10,000 mink from a farm in Sultan.
- **Making meth manufacturing a strike** - Methamphetamine is toxic, highly addictive and utterly destructive to those who use it. It is extremely dangerous to those who come in contact with it. The state has seen a dramatic increase in the number of illegal meth labs – from 38 in 1990 to 1,480 in 2003. Sadly, children have been present in nearly half of these hazardous chemical environments. I co-sponsored legislation that would have made the crime of manufacturing methamphetamine a Class A felony. Under current law, all Class A felonies are on the Three Strikes list. Unfortunately, the measure did not advance in the 2004 session.
- **Sex offenders in schools** - Nearly 150 public school students in Washington are registered sex offenders. If a sex offender moves into your neighborhood, law enforcement officials are required to notify you. Not so, however, if your student is sitting in a class with a sex offender. I introduced legislation that would allow school employees, parents and student to obtain a list of juvenile sex offenders attending schools. This awareness would allow precautions to be taken to protect children. Unfortunately, the Legislature took no action on this public safety measure.

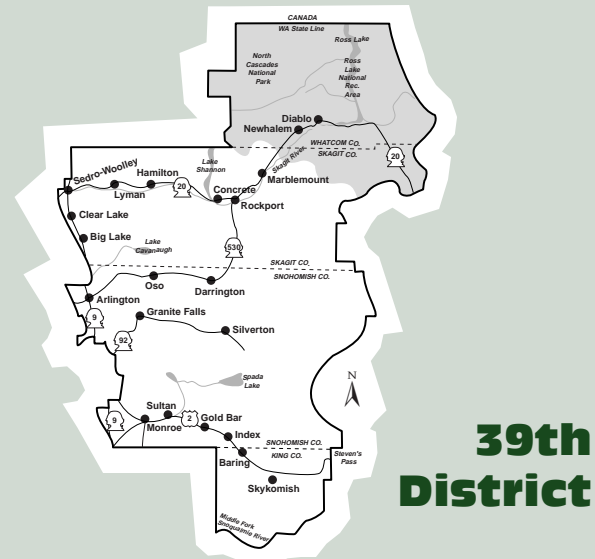
Representative **KIRK PEARSON** • **39th District**

Other bills of interest

- **Primary election system** - After months of debate, the Legislature approved a “Top 2” primary election system to replace Washington’s outlawed blanket primary. The Top 2 would let voters cast ballots for any candidate and would send the top two finishers to the general election. The bill also included a backup plan known as the “modified Montana” primary in case the Top 2 didn’t hold up in court. The Montana system requires voters to pick one party’s ballot for the primary, but keeps their choice secret. When the bill reached the governor’s desk, he vetoed the Top 2 system, effectively implementing the modified Montana system for the primary election this fall.
- **WASL retakes** - The Legislature approved a measure that allows students to retake the Washington Assessment of Student Learning if they don’t pass it the first time. They get four chances and only have to retake the sections they did not complete successfully.
- **Foster parent rights** - Foster parents have told us that they are concerned about caseworkers making unilateral decisions and not allowing them to have input regarding the children they care for. In addition, they are concerned about retaliation by DSHS. The Legislature adopted a measure I co-sponsored which gives foster parents certain rights, prohibits discrimination or retaliation of foster parents, and provides them procedures to file complaints.

Visit your 39th District office!

We’re now in a new location in Sedro-Woolley, open and ready to serve you. My district office is staffed by my legislative assistant, Mike Pierce. Office hours are 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Thursday. We are located at 720 Murdock St., Suite 101, in Sedro-Woolley. The phone number is (360) 856-3588. Come and see us!



**39th
District**

2004 Session-End Report
The Hits and the Misses

Kirk Pearson
State Representative

P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

PRESORTED
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Washington State
Department of Printing